

# “Star Trek: Lower Decks” Breaks Protocol with LGBTQ Representation



On October 14, the season two finale of *Star Trek: Lower Decks* aired on Paramount+, and while the show is lauded [by some](#) for “breaking new ground” as a sci-fi comedy and mature adult animation, often reviewers don’t talk about the LGBTQ representation at the heart of the show itself.

*Star Trek: Lower Decks*, which premiered on the streaming platform CBS All Access (later renamed Paramount+) in August 2020, is the first animated series in the *Star Trek* franchise since *Star Trek: The Animated Series* which aired on NBC from 1973-1974. It has been nominated for three Critics’ Choice Super Awards and one Emmy Award for voice acting, animation, and sound editing. The series focuses on officers of a low rank who engage in menial work, rather than senior officers or captains, who are supporting characters.

The series has four main characters: ensigns Beckett Mariner (voiced by Tawny Newsome), Brad Boimler (voiced by Jack Quaid), D’Vana Tendi (voiced by Noël Wells), and Sam Rutherford (voiced by Eugene Cordero). Supporting characters include Carol Freeman (voiced by Dawnn Lewis), captain of the *Cerritos*, Mariner’s mother, First Officer Jack Ransom (voiced by Jerry O’Connell), Tactical Officer Shaxs (voiced by Fred Tatasciore), and head medical doctor T’Pol (voiced by Gillian Vigman).

Mike McMahan, the creator of *Solar Opposites* and writer and producer of *Rick and Morty*, is the series creator and showrunner, while music is composed by Chris Westlake and Titmouse, Inc. does the series animation. Both series include LGBTQ characters, specifically the genderless aliens Korvo and Terry in *Solar Opposites*. [Sleepy Gary](#) and Jerry Smith on *Rick and Morty* are queer, with [Gary as bisexual](#) and Smith as [bisexual or pansexual](#) as noted in recent episodes.

The ten-episode first season of the series involves wild adventures from fighting a virus infection and terraforming agent on the ship, to ship salvaging, a surprise party, and a family secret, that Freeman is Mariner's mother. The second season ups the ante, with godlike possession of a crew member, a dangerous mission with a "collector," a mission to retrieve a "special item" for T'Ana, a scammer, and a race of beings which duplicate when they get scared. Other episodes focus on the lower deckers cleaning up unpredictable anomalies from previous missions, a malevolent computer A.I., drills for the crew which they are designed to fail, a 12-hour-time warp, and a risky first contact mission.

Through all of this, Mariner's queerness is emphasized. In the show's first season, Captain Amina Ramsey (voiced by Toks Olagundoye) is shown as being chummy with Mariner in the episode "Much Ado About Boimler," and in the episode "No Small Parts" it was shown that she previously dated Steve Levy, a Lieutenant. She also stated in the episode "Envoys" that she once dated a humanoid and female-presenting [Anabaj](#) to anger her mother. In [an October 2020 interview](#), McMahan confirmed that Ramsey was Mariner's ex-girlfriend at Starfleet Academy, and stated that "every Starfleet officer is probably at the baseline[,] bisexual" [and hinted](#) that this would be expanded in the show's second season. This meant that by the end of the show's first season, it was implied that Mariner is bisexual.

However, Season 2 episode "We'll Always Have Tom Paris" blew it out of the water. At one point, Mariner tells Tendi she is "always dating bad boys, bad girls, bad gender non-binary babes, ruthless alien masterminds, [and] bad bynars." As such, this implied she is pansexual, as [some reviewers noted](#). Furthermore, in the show's season two finale, Mariner admitted she liked a female-presenting alien, Jennifer Sh'reyan (voiced by Lauren Lapkus), after Sh'reyan saved her from dying in the void of space, as Mariner's walls began to come down. This led some fans to speculate that the two may be shown as a couple in the upcoming third season.



*Mariner tells Tendi about the people she has dated in the past, hinting at her possible pansexuality*

There appear to be other LGBTQ characters in *Star Trek: Lower Decks* as well, their identities implied. For one, Andarithio “Andy” Billups (voiced by Paul Scheer), the chief engineer aboard the *Cerritos* and prince of Hysperia, is implied to be asexual. In one episode, “Where Pleasant Fountains Lie,” he has no interest in having sex with either the male guard or the female guard. In another, in the simulated drill called “Naked Time,” where all the crew are naked, either kissing one another or engaging in foreplay, which scars poor Mariner, he is not participating in any sexual acts. The funny part about the latter drill is that all of them could see this drill happening with their eyes. Now, that would have been an interesting scene, even though many of them might have been scarred for life if they saw it.

In an interview this month, Quaid has said that [Boimler could be queer](#), stating that he would “not rule it out,” and adding that in the *Star Trek* universe, it is an “aspirational future and sexuality is a spectrum.” That has been shown to be the case with queer characters – for instance, Hikaru Sulu, [a gay man](#) in various *Star Trek* films, while Hugh Culber, who is in a relationship with Paul Stamets in *Star Trek: Discovery*. The latter series also features Gray Tal, a trans man. Kira Nerys, from the mirror universe, in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* is bisexual and [in a relationship with a woman](#), [Ezri Tigan](#). This is not to be confused with the Kira Nerys in the

main universe, who did not have such relationships and had a different sexual orientation. Tigan, on the other hand, also flirts with women other than Nerys from the mirror universe. In the same series, Dax is [a symbiont](#) who became an icon for trans people who changes genders. In *Star Trek: Picard*, Raffi Musiker is the romantic partner of Seven of Nine.

It is likely that Sh'reyan, an Andorian woman, will have more of a recurring role in the show's next season. This can be extrapolated from McMahan's [recent interview with SYFY](#) where he talks about how the arc with Sh'reyan started with an ad-lib from Tawny Newsome, with Sh'reyan pushed aside in the episode "Cupid's Errant Arrow." Apart from the interaction between Mariner and Sh'reyan in the Season Two finale and both crossing paths briefly across many episodes, Sh'reyan is coded as liking women. She is shown kissing Barnes, an ensign, in the "Naked Time" simulation, is talking with an officer, Castro, in the episode "wej Duj."

Many shipping fan fictions [for Mariner](#) are more skewed toward men, like Boimler and Ransom, and less so toward anyone else, with those fan fictions shipping Mariner with Boimler, a ship dubbed "Marinler" by fans which is popular on AO3 and Tumblr. These fan fictions are just as valid as those shipping her with women like Tendi, or those which describe Mariner as in polyamorous relationships, to give two examples. Marinler fans see Mariner and Boimler as more than friends and buds. They see Mariner as Boimler as two people who are romantic toward each other. This perspective is completely understandable based on the interactions between Mariner and Boimler during the series, even if other fans, like me, interpret the interactions between Mariner and Boimler as being more platonic. While Marinler fan fictions will undoubtedly continue to prosper and grow, even without a dedicated subreddit, in the fandom, it is possible that there will be more fan fictions which ship Mariner with non-male characters. After all, [McMahan has confirmed](#) that Mariner will be dating Jennifer in the next season of *Star Trek: Lower Decks*. McMahan also noted that although the show is "not about Mariner's romantic relationships" it instead focuses on how Mariner "sees herself, and how she treats friends and colleagues more than romantic partners," in his words.



Mariner admits she likes Sh'reyan in the season two finale

A third season of *Star Trek: Lower Decks* [is already confirmed](#) and will likely air sometime in 2022. If Mariner gets a girlfriend, like Sh'reyan, as was implied in the Season 2 finale, and is shown exploring her identity more in the season, then it would mean that series would truly be one of the best representations in mature animation for a while. It would far exceed representation embodied by the lesbian protagonist in the mature animation *Final Space*, named Ash Graven (voiced by [Ashly Burch](#)), for which I gave [an overly optimistic \(perhaps too optimistic\) assessment](#) which led to annoyance from angry Redditors at my “incorrect” assessment of the series.

Unlike *Final Space*, which was sadly cancelled earlier this year due to the merger of Discovery and Warner Media [according to](#) *Final Space* [creator Olan Rogers](#), *Star Trek: Lower Decks* will continue on due to its seeming support from ViacomCBS and CBS executives. As such, the series can expand its LGBTQ representation, apart from Mariner and possibly Billups, to, hopefully, others in the main cast like Tendi, Rutherford, or Boimler, or even in the supporting cast. However, it does not seem that any of the cast members are part of the LGBTQ community, which is unfortunate.

As such, *Star Trek: Lower Decks* has the possibility of moving mature animation in a more inclusive direction, joining the ranks of ongoing mature animations like *The Great North*,

*Invincible*, *RWBY*, *Disenchantment*, *Harley Quinn*, *Tuca & Bertie*, *Bojack Horseman*, and [gen:LOCK](#), to name a few, of series with LGBTQ characters. While I remain cautiously optimistic that *Star Trek: Lower Decks* will do this for LGBTQ representation, I'm not holding my breath, as the season could go a different direction and focus on something else entirely.

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